

My Hometown

I never thought of my childhood and hometown as anything unique or interesting because it was the only thing I knew. I suppose that's the same for most people. But now, many decades later, and with all the changes in our world, I can recognize that the way I grew up no longer exists.

I'm not one of those people who looks backwards and thinks that everything was better and that the world is going to hell in a handbasket. There were certainly parts of growing up in the 1960s and 70s that appear wonderful in hindsight, but there was a darkness as well that I'm glad we've left behind.

My grandfather, Marcus Orene "M.O." Williams, traveled south from Adrian Georgia in 1913 for reasons unknown, and married Olive Ora Harris from Eustis when he was 21 years old.



He opened a pharmacy in Mount Dora on the northeast corner of Donnelly and Fourth Avenue (400 N Donnelly St), where the Piglet's Pantry store has been for a number of years. When my father, M.O. Williams Jr, (always known only as "Buster") was born in 1914, they lived in one of the apartments above the pharmacy.



Northeast corner of Fourth and Donnelly around 1920 (you can see the “Williams Pharmacy” on the corner of the building)



This was taken on the corner of 4th, looking north up Donnelly. The date would have been around 1914-1920, and you can see that Model T's were just catching on. There is a horse and buggy on the left and another one coming down the dirt street. You can see people on the balcony above the “Williams Pharmacy” sign, which is where my father lived with his parents when he was born in 1914. (I love how you had to be reminded, “Keep to the Right”)

Times-Union.
We saw him. It was "white mule"
and he was "buggy."

case.
I have met a number of friends

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WILLIAMS PHARMACY

"On the Corner"

Mount Dora Florida

Notice the address: "On the Corner"

A couple of years later the family rented a house at 933 Alexander St., where they lived for several years, and ultimately had a total of four children. The home had no running water upstairs and electricity had just become common enough to be included in the design. My father had a distinct memory from that house when the doctor came and circumcised him in an upstairs bedroom when he was a very young boy. Even in his 80s, he could still recall that story as if it had just happened!



That's "Buster's" head in the foreground and his sister on the porch at 933 Alexander Street in 1917-18. Note that people didn't have grass yards back then.

My grandmother Olive had a sister Mary, who married Otto "Jack" Simpson, and thus our connection to the original Mount Dora family.

My grandfather was a member of the Elks, Shriners, Kiwanis and one of the people who founded the Mount Dora Yacht Club. It was a small town and evidently he was a big fish. Much to the shock of everyone, he died in 1926 at the age of just 34. An abscess on his lip became infected and he died of blood poisoning - something that could be easily treated today. Antibiotics were invented two years later. The news made the front page of the *Mount Dora Topic*: "When announcement of his death came, it found unprepared a city composed of people who knew him, and only knew him with respect and admiration". It also said, "But man proposes and God disposes", which is interesting language used in that time. There were no Social Security benefits or safety nets of any kind back then, so my 11-year-old father, along with his three younger siblings and their grieving mother, had to move back with her parents to the family home in Eustis.

MOUNT DORA POST OFFICE RECEIPTS INCREASE 81 PER CENT

Mount Dora — Population 10,000 by 1927. Millions of Dollars Being Invested

MOUNT DORA TOPIC

Mount Dora—the fastest growing Florida town! Among the Lakes and Hills

VOL. XI—No. 1

MOUNT DORA, LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA, JANUARY 7, 1926

Five Cents a Copy

M. O. WILLIAMS DEAD --- DEEP SORROW HERE

Dr. M. O. Williams died at the Orlando Hospital Tuesday night at about 8 o'clock, aged 34 years.

This announcement flashed here in the early hours of Tuesday night caused widespread grief. Although it was known that he was at the hospital for treatment, only a few intimate friends knew that his condition was considered critical. And when announcement of his death came, it found unprepared a city composed of people who knew him, and knew him only to respect and admire.

He had been suffering from a carbuncle on the hip. Sunday morning it became so troublesome that he deemed it wise to go to the hospital at Orlando for treatment. It was not considered serious, and friends were told that he would probably be back in Mount Dora the last of the week.

But man proposes and God disposes. Blood poisoning developed. All that medical aid and the most expert trained nursing and loving care could do, was done. But slowly his life ebbed away and just as it was time for the moon to come shining over the lake he loved so well, he passed away as peacefully as a child lies down to its noonday sleep.

M. O. Williams was born at Adrian, Georgia, November 14th, 1891. His father was a farmer and his mother was a school teacher. He spent his boyhood days on the farm. He attended the public schools of his native village and then went to Sparks Collegiate Institute at Sparks, Georgia. He later graduated as a pharmacist from Southern College with high honors.

In 1908 he came to Apopka, Florida, and went to live with his brother, D. B. Williams and continued his schooling there. In 1914 he went to Eustis where he took a position with the Palm Pharmacy, but a little later came to Mount Dora and opened a drug store here. He then opened a chain of drug stores at Umatilla.

(Continued on page four)

Clermont, Tavares, Apopka, and Eustis, at the same time continuing his store in Mount Dora. These were later disposed of, his brother, Dr. D. B. Williams, continuing the Mount Dora store.

He was one of the men who always had great faith in the future of this city and exemplified that faith by investment in various parcels of real estate. A few months ago he engaged in the real estate business. From its very inception it was a success. He knew property here, he had the cream of listings, and when he advised a client he did so with complete mastery of the matter under discussion. It was only a few days ago that he expressed to the writer his faith in the city and hoped for great things during the coming year.

On September 2, 1913, he married Miss Ollie O. Harris, a daughter of S. L. Harris, of Eustis. Four children were born to them, M. O. Jr., Virginia, Harry and Sam. Besides the widow and the children, he is survived by his mother, Mrs. Louise Williams of Mount Dora; a sister, Miss Jessie of Jacksonville and two brothers, George Morgan of Jacksonville and Dr. D. B. Williams of Mount Dora.

Deceased was a member of the F. & A. M. and a Shriner; of the B. P. O. E. and Knights of Pythias. He was also a member of the Kiwanis Club of Mount Dora and the Mount Dora Yacht Club.

In his home life he was all that goes to make up a perfect husband, son and father. In his associations with his fellow men he was loyal and true to every trust.

And as his years increased, so grew and grew this circle of friends until it stretched for out beyond the confines of his home community. Once his friends, always his friends.

In civic advancement he could always be found in the front ranks giving his support, both personally and financially, to every movement tending to advance the interests of Mount Dora and its people. In the lodge; in the social clubs, his advice was always sought and always found to be sound. Everywhere, and under every condition, he was the type which makes up a high class community and it will indeed be hard to fill his place.

In times like these words seem to have an empty sound. But to the grief stricken family assurance of the deepest sorrow are extended in this hour of their bereavement.

The funeral will be held Thursday at 10:30 a. m., from the M. E. Church, Mount Dora. Interment at Forest Cemetery.



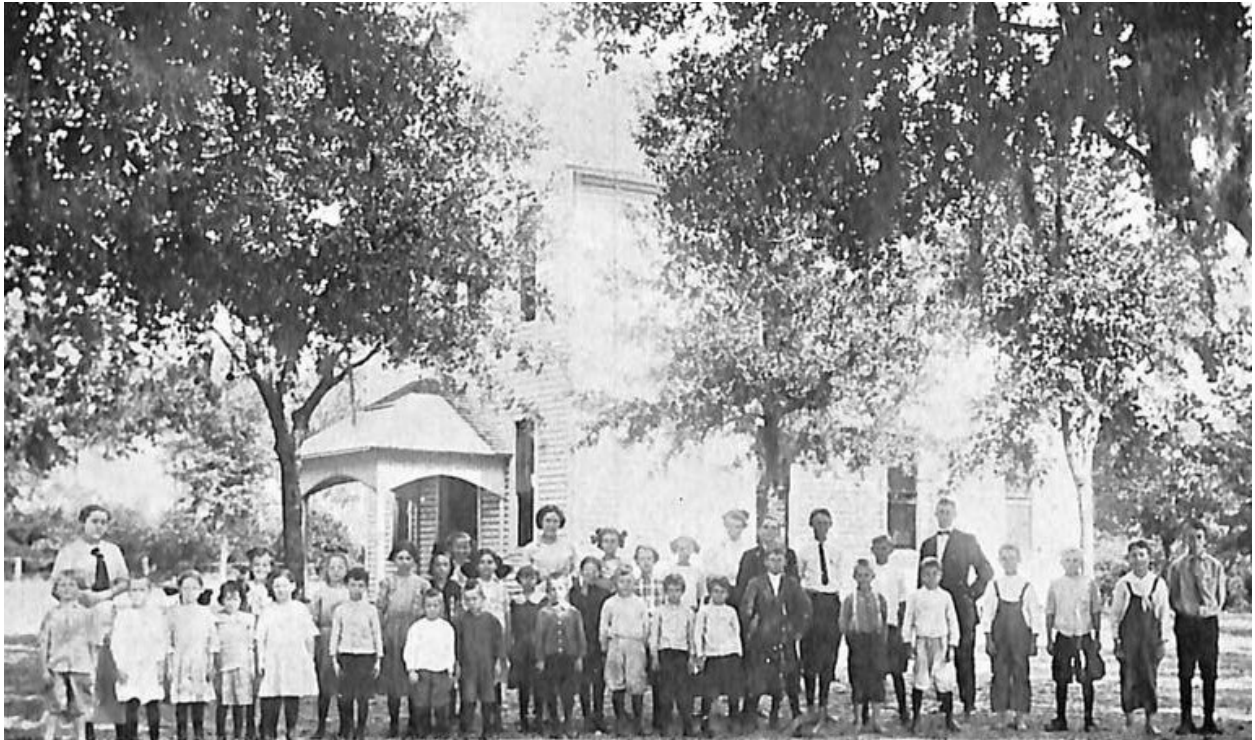
I find this photo to be so sad. It must have been taken after 1926 when my grandfather died at age 34. My dad is up front on the left, next to his sister, Virginia Williams (1915-1982), and his Aunt, Mary Harris(1900-1970) on the right, who ended up marrying Otto "Jack" Simpson. Behind Virginia on the right is her grieving mother, Olive (1891-1972), beside her twin sister, Elizabeth Harris (1891-1976). The man holding the child (thought to be my dad's baby brother, Samuel Williams (1922-1945)) is the grandfather, Samuel Lee Harris (1867-1948), to the right, Reba Harris (1897-1988) and then the grandmother, Dora Alice (Brown) Harris (1866-1950). The tall man on the upper left is the only son of Samuel and Dora, Harry Harris (1894-1970). The woman standing on the far right is Maude Harris (1892-

1965). I assume the people in the middle of the back row are the spouses and children of Harry and Maude.

My dad initially went to school in the wooden two-story schoolhouse that was on the corner of Clayton and 8th. When Roseborough School opened in 1922, all 12 grades were represented and he went there for several years, eventually having to transfer to Eustis High School. He said he had failed so many grades, that by the time he graduated he was older than one of his teachers! There is probably a grain of truth to that story. Another story my dad told many times was about how "Prof Roseborough", referring to the Mount Dora principal, had learned how to make his school look better. Even back then, tests were given once a year so that the state could determine how well students were learning in each town. On the day of the test, "Prof" would make sure that the boys he thought would be most likely to bring down the average score would be absent or otherwise occupied that day. Perhaps dad knew this because he was one of those kids?



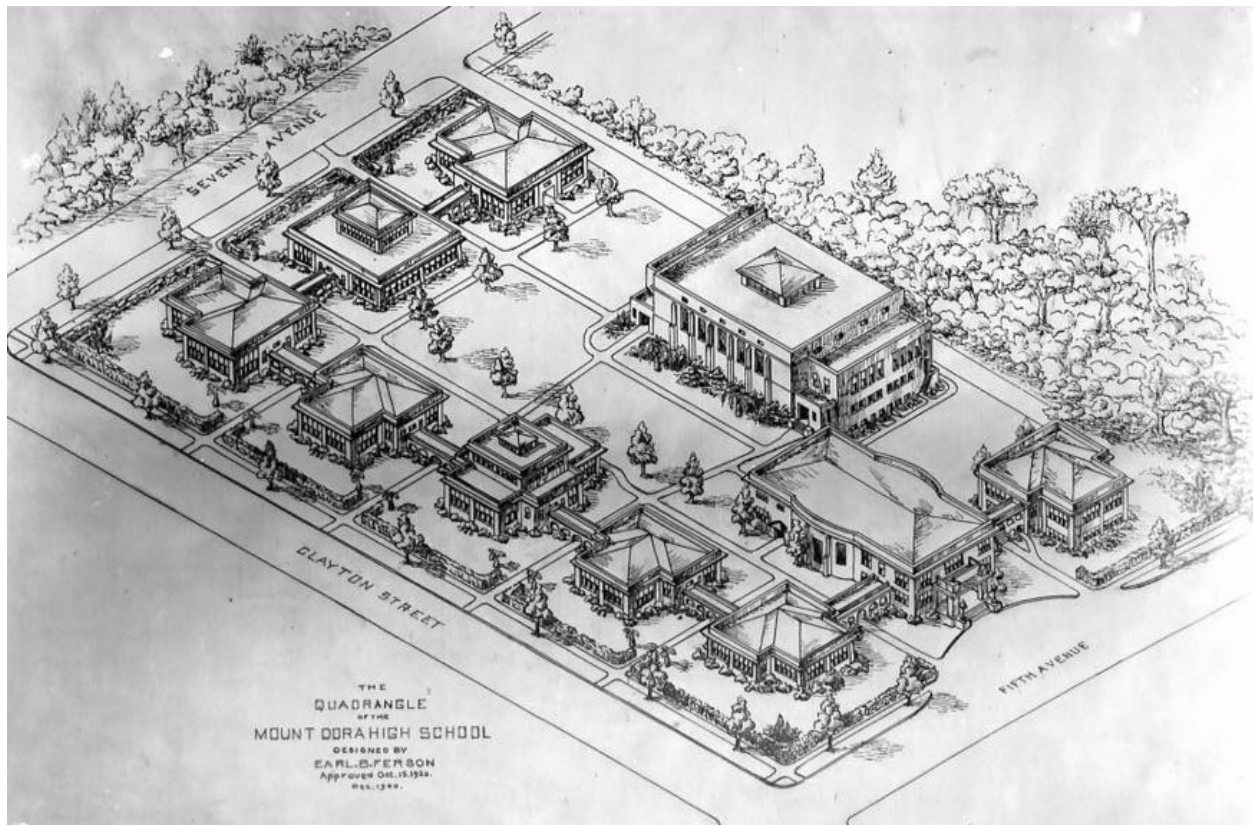
*This school house was built in 1895 at the corner of Clayton and 7th.
Buster went there until the new Roseborough school was completed around 1922.*



My dad could have been one of these kids, but I don't recognize him in this undated photo.



When the Roseborough campus opened, Buster went to school there until the family had to move to his grandparent's home in Eustis after his father died.



This was the original plan for the Roseborough campus, which was built in stages as funds became available. It ended up roughly like this, with each grade having its own building. My first grade class was in the upper right corner, and then we moved left and down Clayton Street with each successive grade level. The large structure is the gym, which was built with Depression WPA money in the 40's, and is the only building still there. My brother Mark went to all 12 grades here and was the last graduating class in 1961, when grades 7-12 were moved to the new campus, a block away at Highland and 7th.



SCHOOL SAFETY PATROL

ROSEBOROUGH
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

MOUNT DORA, FLORIDA

1968-1969

Gerald E. Gelwick

PRINCIPAL

I went to Roseborough from first grade through sixth, and in the final year some of my friends and I were chosen to be on the "safety patrol", which basically meant we helped the policewoman who stopped traffic each morning and afternoon at Clayton and 5th to let kids cross the road. She got hit by a car one day and I had to go with my parents to visit her in the hospital in Eustis. (she ended up OK and went back on the job). That's me standing on the right side of the school marker. I was a head shorter than the other boys, so that's why I'm up there.

Buster said that when he was a young boy, one of his jobs each evening was to herd the cows from the pasture where the Mount Dora Christian Academy is now, down the unpaved Donnelly Street, to the milking station which was at the corner of Third Avenue. This may seem far-fetched, but you have to remember that in 1920 Mount Dora had an official population of only 725 people!

One of the unique things about this town is that most of the buildings that were in the downtown area when my father was a child in the 1920s are still there. There was a fire in 1922 that destroyed a few buildings on the east side of Donnelly Street between fifth and fourth Avenue, but those were quickly rebuilt.



This is 5th Ave looking east. The Amoco gas station is one of three at the corner of Alexander and 5th, and you can see the Princess Theater on the right

As automobiles became more common, Buster said that when a Model T would be coming down the hill on Fifth Avenue and make a right turn to go up Donnelly Street, if they were going too fast, sometimes they would tip over. People would rush out onto the street, and if no one was hurt, they would just push it back up on all four tires, and off they would go.

It's easy to forget that until the early 1960s, when the "new" 441 highway was built, Fifth Avenue *was* Highway 441, and essentially the only way you could get from Orlando to Ocala was to drive through the middle of Mount Dora. Even when I was a kid, the town was still riddled with full-service gas stations, fighting for the attention of customers with "gas wars", and prices around \$.32 per gallon.



There were three full-service gas stations at the corner of Alexander and 4th, and the Chevron pump was run by Millard Reid. My friend Murray started working there

when he was 11 years old in 1968, and was paid 35 cents an hour. Minimum wage was \$1.60 at the time.

When that new highway was proposed in the late 1950s, Mount Dora had a very difficult and important decision to make. Would it allow all of that traffic to bypass the downtown area and miss out on all of those customers, or find a way to put this proposed highway through the center of town? After much debate and heated discussion, it was determined that the route would go north and then west around town, through the orange groves that were ubiquitous at that time. Howard Simpson owned those groves, and my dad said that he was none too happy about the government forcing him to sell a wide swath of his property. In hindsight, I'm sure his heirs are glad he did, because they are all now millionaires, with property facing that very road.

Despite losing his father at such a young age, Buster went on to become an Eagle Scout, bred prize-winning roosters that he exhibited at the county fair, *eventually* graduated from high school, and went to the University of Florida, where he received a degree in agricultural marketing.



Always a smartass, Buster goofing with his girlfriend and his rooster ribbons in high school

Trying to find his way in the world at the height of the Great Depression must've been daunting; fortunately, the US Army recognized they needed his skills, and in just four years he moved up the ranks to become Lieutenant Colonel. While stationed near Hattiesburg, Mississippi, he met my mom, Jean Louise Littlepage, a local girl and a graduate of Ole Miss. She was a genuine card-carrying "Daughter of the American Revolution" and a mostly soft-spoken Southern Belle. She could draw beautifully, was keenly observant, and smart enough to finish the New York Times crossword puzzle every day...in ink. If Buster was the head of the household, she was the neck that turned it. He agreed and gave her credit for every good thing that came to them.

Jean's job was being a mom to three boys, and she would say that her main task was to prepare them to be kicked out of the nest. All of us were off to college when the time came, without a clue that there was any alternative.



To give you an idea who my mom was, we had a very old and beautiful Live Oak tree in our front yard that was growing close to the power lines. A city worker came to the house one day in the early 70's to trim the tree, and my mom was determined to not let that happen. She offered to pay to have the wires moved underground and pleaded with the electric department to spare the tree. The next

time they sent a guy to cut the tree, my mom walked across the front yard holding my brother's 22 rifle. She didn't aim at him or threaten him, she just held the gun and let the man know she wanted him to leave. He did, and that tree is still standing in front of 631 E Third Ave.

Jean was the bright and pretty product of a tough, but tiny, Scottish woman who was a suffragette and a vegetarian before anyone had heard of that.



Janet Isabella Corrie (my mom's mother)



Jean Littlepage (Williams) with her mother and sister

Jean's father was born in Guatemala because his father, C.P. Littlepage, fought on the wrong side of the Civil War in Texas, and when it was all over he refused to submit to the Union Army. C.P. moved to Guatemala, where he married a French woman and had several children. Cooler heads eventually prevailed, and they moved back to Mississippi when my grandfather was 14, so all the kids could have a better education.



C.P. Littlepage with his 6 children, and seemingly unhappy wife, Jeanne, in Guatemala

My grandfather, Williams Wallace Littlepage, is foreground left

When Buster asked Jean to marry him, there was just one small problem: she was already engaged to another man. He had solved bigger problems than that, and

soon they were married, living on an army base in Maryland and producing my brother Mark in 1943 and Sam in 1945.



Buster ready for battle in the Army

It was my dad's good fortune that he had the expertise needed stateside to help feed the troops overseas. His baby brother Samuel was not so lucky, and even

though initially deemed physically unfit for military service, he was eventually drafted when they required more men for the "Battle of the Bulge" in Germany. He is buried in a military cemetery in France and is the reason our brother bears his name. I always had the feeling that Buster carried a sense of guilt about that death that he always carried with him.



Samuel Lee Williams (1922-1945)

To round out the picture of all that he overcame and why they are aptly called "the greatest generation"-- in addition to losing his father at an early age and a brother in the war, his sister died a long, slow death from alcoholism, and his remaining brother was a "bachelor" (a euphemism back then for being gay) and lived the rest of his life in Spain. Fortunately, we think nothing of that now, but in those days admitting you had a gay brother was just something that was not done.

When our family moved to Mount Dora after the war, Buster liked to say, "We didn't have a pot to pee in". Good old "Uncle Jack" Simpson came to the rescue with a loan that got the family started again, and they rented a small house on Eighth Avenue, across from what was then the high school football field. Over a period of several years, and with jobs as a buyer at different grocery chains, they were able to repay the loan, and buy the house at 631 Third Avenue in 1953, which would remain their home for the next 35 years. They paid \$10,000 for that house and the one next door.

It was in the summer of '55 that another of those events occurred that would forever change Buster's life. While driving the family to the beach one weekend, dad pulled over to get some drinks out of the cooler in the trunk. While standing

behind the car, another vehicle ran off the road and smashed his left leg between the bumpers. A few inches more to the right and both legs would have been hit. Even in his condition of pain and shock, he was still telling everyone to stay calm and how to go for help. After four months in the hospital, massive amounts of blood, multiple surgeries and having beaten his growing need for Morphine, the leg could not be saved. These days they could have patched him up and sent him home jogging, but that was a different time. After all this experience, the one thing he kept saying was, "I'm just glad to be alive".

It was also during this time that Buster developed a business of his own, and eventually became the personal sales force for the fresh vegetables grown at the muck farms near Zellwood. Buster also helped organize a group of usually uncooperative farmers into a co-operative that built and ran the Growers Precooler that many of us boys worked at as teenagers.



Always the troublemaker, my dad thought this corn label would be remembered – it was!

People ask me the story behind this and I remind them that Buster raised roosters as a kid and I think he was fascinated by their ability to reproduce

Buster was the Scoutmaster of Troop 19 in the mid-fifties, and the Boy Scouts was one of his main loves, and one that he continued to support his whole life.

The other thing that he was concerned with was education. Not long after his accident, he successfully ran for Lake County School Board in 1958 and eventually won four elections, totaling sixteen years of service. I believe he was most proud of helping to push integration through the eye of a very reluctant needle during the 60's. This did not win him many friends. He also had the swamp east of the new

(1962) high school converted to a football field. It was his idea to use prestressed concrete for the bleachers instead of wood, which was the norm, but constantly in need of replacement. The concrete was ugly and uncomfortable, but it's still there being used 60 years later. When he couldn't get the School Board to pay for something, sometimes he'd just do it himself. We have a long sheet of paper filled with names of students from Mount Dora High School thanking him for the air conditioner he bought for the science building in the early 60's. Buster and Jean had a private, anonymous scholarship fund within the Mount Dora Community Trust that they used to help send students to college. To him, a good education was just that important.

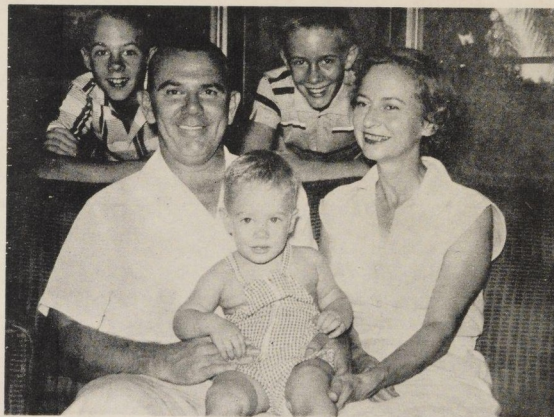
Vote September 9 for

A Champion of Good Schools

M. O. "Buster" Williams

Candidate for

LAKE COUNTY BOARD OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION



BUSTER AND HIS FAMILY

NATIVE OF LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA
GRADUATE OF EUSTIS HIGH SCHOOL, 1934
GRADUATE OF UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, 1938
ATTENDED CORNELL UNIVERSITY ONE YEAR
WORLD WAR II VETERAN

School Trustee

... who attends all School Board meetings; active in all school affairs.

Business Man

... after working his way through college, Buster has become a successful Lake county produce broker.

Family Man

... the father of three sons, Buster will be active in education for many years to come!

Boy Scout Executive
Civic Activities: Kiwanis Club (Past President)
Church Worker

Buster running for Lake County School Board in 1958

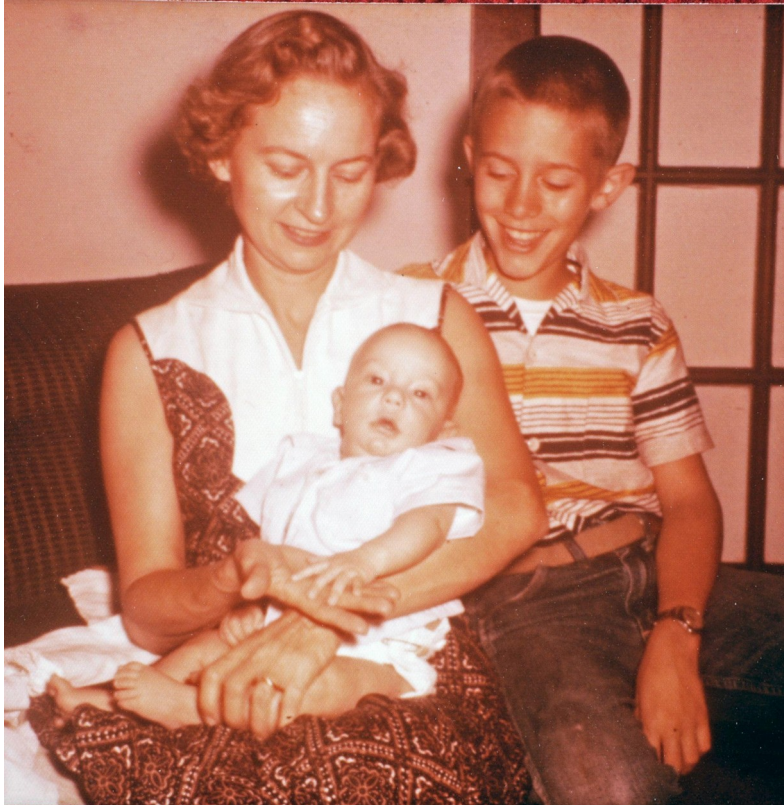
He was a die-hard University of Florida Gator fan, and he took whatever sport they were playing, very seriously. One time he came back from a University of Florida track meet with a huge crater in the roof of his car because a typewriter had fallen off the press box he was parked under. Luckily "Uncle Jack" was our insurance man, and he believed the story. I suppose Buster is best known for organizing the "Gator Bus" to Gainesville football games for over fifty years. Some people never even made it off the bus to watch the game, but they had a good time and they made it back home in one piece.



Buster being recognized for organizing the "Gator Bus" for 50 years

Dad was a liberal in the best sense of the word. He felt that time and money, spent in the right way, really could make a difference to someone's life. He believed that "Government" wasn't something "over there", but that it was "us", and that it was worth being involved in to solve problems. He believed in the power of both individual initiative and group action. He taught all three of his sons that they could make a difference in the world. We grew up hearing that we could do anything we set our minds to, and we believed him. It never dawned on us not to be Eagle Scouts, or to go to college, or to pick the profession of our choosing. We were given the tools, and the freedom to use them, and for this I will forever be thankful. He was an excellent father, a loving and openly affectionate husband to the very end, a humanitarian and philanthropist, he believed in God, he trusted people, and most of all he was an insufferable optimist. Ask him how he felt, and most often the answer would be, "Too good to be true!" I consider it an honor to have known him at all, and it was a great privilege to have been his son.

I was the last addition to the Williams family, born in December of 1956 to a shocked but pleased mother who was almost 40 years old. I never heard it or felt it, but now a common term is the "oops baby". My mother kept the bill from the hospital in Leesburg where I was born, and evidently at the time it was not unusual for a new mother to spend extra time there, recuperating. She was also probably glad to get away from my brothers who were 12 and 13 at the time! The invoice showed she stayed at the hospital for 12 days at a cost of \$17 per day.



Steve Williams in 1956 with mom, Jean, and bother, Sam

\$17 a day to stay in the hospital and not have to be home with my brothers, priceless!

Back then, there were no pediatricians in Mount Dora, and Dr. Montgomery delivered me and was our family physician until he retired. Those were the days when a doctor would also make house calls, if necessary, and I distinctly remember him coming into my bedroom once when I was a kid with the mumps. He had a big black satchel that would splay open from the middle with all kinds of equipment and medications inside. He was a kind and soft-spoken man who handled all things medical in our small town. He was the team physician for the Mount Dora High School football team, and could be seen pacing the sidelines of every home football game in his heavy plaid shirt, smoking a cigar.

Dr. Montgomery's time reviving football players helped me personally in my own moment of trauma and panic. I was six years old and riding back home after

cruising around town on my Schwinn bicycle. I was flying down the slight hill on Baker Street, peddling past Atkins Dry Cleaners, and I cruised right through the stop sign at the bottom of the hill. In my defense, there was another little hill ahead that I had to climb and I didn't want to lose my momentum. I never saw the car coming up Fourth Avenue.

Danny McWhorter was a junior at Mount Dora High, and at 16 years old, a fairly new driver, but there was nothing he could have done. The bumper of his '46 Chevy just barely caught my rear fender and I went flying through the air. I landed flat on my back on a little patch of grass between the road and the sidewalk. That in itself was a miracle, because in 1965 nobody had even heard of a bicycle helmet. Danny jumped out and ran over to see if I was still alive and quickly realized he had almost killed not just any kid, but Buster Williams' son. It was a small town.

I didn't realize it at the moment, but I had the wind knocked out of me and it felt as if I couldn't breathe. Miracle number two is that all this happened about 100 feet from my doctor's office, so Danny flew down the street in a panic, quickly followed by Dr. Montgomery, running back towards me. After seeing that my limbs were in the proper place and that I was not gushing blood, he grabbed me by the belt and lifted me up in the air. To my great relief, this filled my lungs with oxygen and I realized I was going to live. Dr. Montgomery had learned that trick, and performed it many times, on those football players.

It's difficult to imagine now that a six-year-old would be riding his bike all over town by himself, but that's the way it was back then. When you came home after school, you might get a snack, but then you were gone until it was time to be home for dinner. My parents never really knew where I was. I think that was true for all my friends that I grew up with, but there was also a general understanding that any of their parents were also temporarily your parents when needed. When they say "it takes a village", I guess that's the meaning. From a kids point of view you felt safe because you knew that everyone was watching out for you, and later in life, maybe a little thwarted, because everyone was still watching out for you! It was very difficult to get away with anything.



This was taken by a photographer for the Orlando Sentinel, and was published in 1969.

I'm shown riding up 5th Ave towards Baker St on my Schwinn "Sting-Ray" bike, complete with Banana seat, stick-shift and "Ape Hanger" handlebars, it was the coolest thing a boy could have at that time.

The consistency of the environment also led to a feeling of security. I have a dozen friends that I was in school with from kindergarten through high school. Many of the teachers that my brothers had traumatized 12 years earlier, were still there when I arrived in their class and it sometimes seemed like they predetermined who I was going to be based on how much they liked my brothers!

I lived in the same house from the moment I was brought home from the hospital until I graduated high school, and even though I'm sure it had a lock, I never had a key, nor saw it used. I lived a block from the elementary school, two blocks from the high school, and I would often meet my friend Andy in front of our house in the morning and walk to class together. It seemed as if most of my friends had the same situation: they never moved, their father always had the same job, their mom was always home after school, and the parents always stayed together. The first time I heard about a divorce in our community, I didn't know what to think.



Mrs Cross's 1961 kindergarten class-most of these kids graduated from Mount Dora High School 13-14 years later. One is now my next door neighbor. I'm in the middle row, second from the right, and my girlfriend then, Barbara Sue Vason, is the blond girl, two over to my right.



Birthday photo taken in our front yard with my buddies, around 1966, with skateboards and a unicycle and my mom watching from the window. Too cool for girls at that age.



A lot of those same boys can be seen in this photo when we were cheerleaders for the girls "Powderpuff" football game in 1975. I'm in the middle, front.

Mrs. Hamlin was my first grade teacher and a close friend of my father, who was also essentially her boss's boss, because he was on the school board. One day I did something bad in class that warranted a spanking, which she administered quickly without any fear of recrimination from my parents. The feeling at the time was that if you got in trouble at school, you were also going to be in trouble at home, because the parents supported the teachers and trusted them. I'm sure it seems strange now, but back then paddling was a common practice, even all the way through my years in high school. We made a wood paddle in shop class for the assistant principal that had holes in it so it would sting even more, hoping, of course, that it would never be used on one of us!



Shown above are Scott Alderman and Stephen Williams as they are learning the art of sailing a pram and doing it quite well. They will participate in the 14th annual Sailing Regatta to be held in Mount

Dora Sunday. This event is cosponsored by the Mount Dora Chamber of Commerce and the Mount Dora Yacht Club. (Lake-Sumter Sentinel Photo by Martha Overhiser)

This photo about the annual Mount Dora Yacht Club Sailing Regatta was published in the Lake Sentinel in April of 1967. A bunch of us kids learned to sail on Lake Dora, and my friend Scott, seen in the photo as a 10 year old, has for decades taken tourists on boat tours on that same lake. The bug hit me as well and I went on to

sail my own boat over 10,000 miles in the South Pacific over a span of three years in the 90's.

When I was a kid, downtown Mount Dora had just about everything you would need: a grocery store, bank, hardware store, movie theater, drugstore, doctor, barber, and three full service gas stations. There was no such thing as self-service. You sat in your car while they pumped your gas, washed the windshield and asked if you needed your oil checked, which you quite often did.

The drugstore on Donnelly Street had a soda fountain with a line of spinning stools, and was a hangout for kids after school. My personal favorites were a root beer float or a vanilla Coke.

For some reason, we had two hardware stores, side-by-side: Moon's and Rehbaum's, which was at the corner of Donnelly and Fourth (400 N Donnelly), exactly where my grandfather's pharmacy was located in the 20's. You could find anything in these stores, from the tiniest bolt to a refrigerator or washing machine.

Across Fourth Avenue to the south, where the "Mount Dora Market" is now (100 E 4th Ave), there was a gas station that also doubled as the Greyhound Bus stop.



This part of the original gas station on the southeast corner of Donnelly and 4th is still there, but a two-story section was added, facing 4th

Right across Donnelly on the other corner, where the Las Palmas Cuban restaurant is now (351 N Donnelly), was "Vincent's Five and Dime", where if they didn't have it, you didn't need it. It was full of stuff, and for kids, it was the place you'd get your comic books.



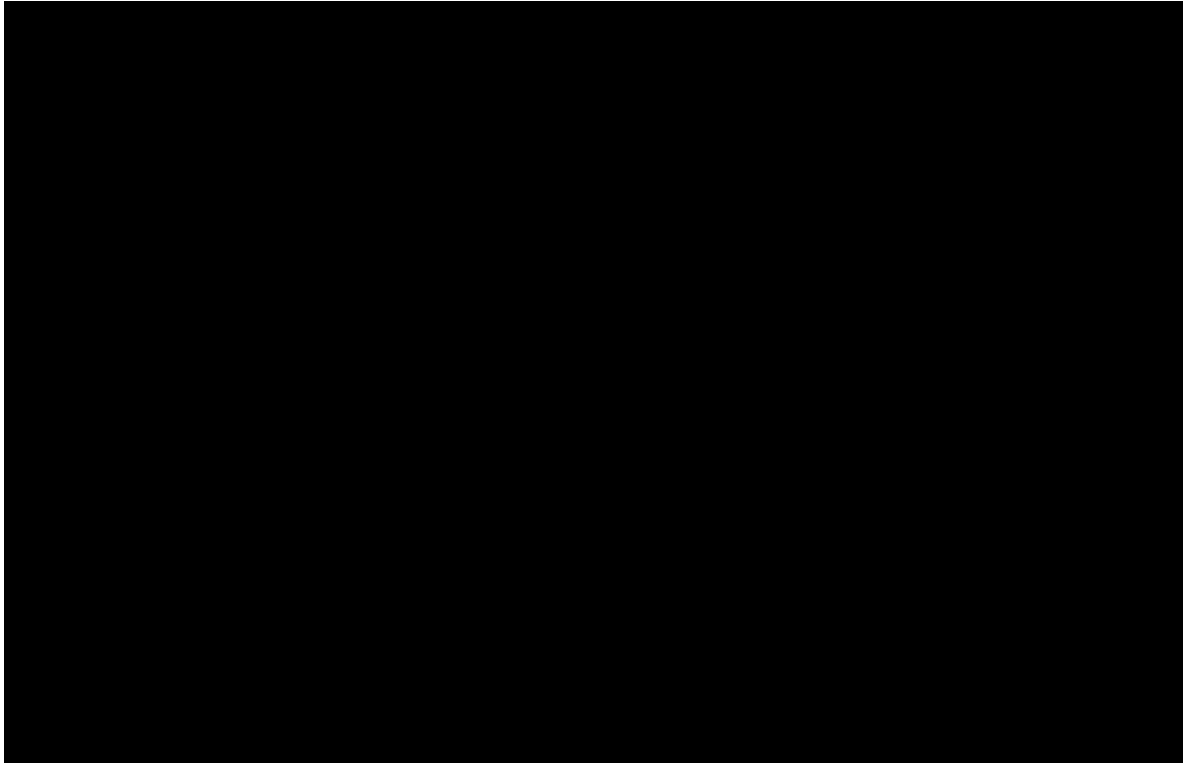
Vincent's Five and Dime store

The entire building where the Fiesta Grande Mexican restaurant and Modernism Museum are located on Baker Street was Lloyd Atkins dry cleaners. It was an incredibly hot and smelly place that was the closest thing to a factory in town.

Across the street, at 142 E 4th Ave, where the 1921 restaurant is now, was the office of Dr. Montgomery. The second floor of that building was also a home for unwed mothers, but that was a bit before my time.

The big two-story building on the southwest corner of Donnelly and Fifth Avenue (100 W 5th Ave), now containing a real estate company, was built in the 20's and was the home of the First National Bank of Mount Dora until 1965, when they moved up the street two blocks.

For a long time it would be the largest building I would see, meant to appear imposing and safe to store your money. When you walked in, you could see straight up two stories to the ceiling, with a few tellers behind bars on the ground floor and administrative offices upstairs. They were only open to the public from 10 AM to 2 PM--bankers hours! George White was the president of the bank, and looked like one, always wearing a suit, even in the sweltering heat of summer. His son took over the bank after him, and his grandson Bob, about my age, is now the president.



First National Bank of Mount Dora - notice the original entrance was on Donnelly Street

At that same intersection, but on the east side of Donnelly, where Matamo Designs (100 E 5th Ave) is now, was the office of Roy Christopher, the town attorney. At 116 E Fifth Ave, my "Uncle Jack's" had his office, Simpson Insurance, where the Thai restaurant has been for many years. Looking back on it, all of these businessmen seemed to me like caricatures from a movie. Impeccably dressed, well mannered, pillars of the community. I distinctly remember one of them showing off the garters he used to hold up his socks!

It's hard to believe now, but during the 60's, there were absolutely no restaurants in downtown Mount Dora, unless you count "Charlies", which was a hamburger joint in the two-story building on the northwest corner of Donnelly and Fifth (520 N Donnelly). The "restaurant" had big, padded naugahyde booths in the front window and some stools along a counter where you could sit and watch the heavysset Charlie, in his grease-stained apron, flip hamburgers. The grill was seasoned with the accumulation of years of burger meat. On those rare times he would clean it, you didn't want to eat there for a while until it got its flavor back again. Charlie had a big glass jar of butterscotch candies, and he would always insist on giving me one. I didn't like the flavor at all, but my dad taught me that I needed to be thankful and appear as if I liked it. My mom really liked his "Nell Burger" creation, which was a slice of onion between two patties of beef that had been sealed around the edges before cooking. As a kid, I thought that was disgusting. When you walked into

Charlie's, you were inundated with the smell of burgers, and it had a very high ceiling with just a few lights that made it seem kind of dark and dingy. In order to get to the bathroom, you had to walk through a large unused space where you could see indentations in the floor where they used to have bowling. My father remembered doing that as a kid, and he recalled that you had to set up the pins by hand.



"Charlie's" was in the space with the orange awning. Note the shuffleboard courts in the park and the lack of "New Orleans style" ironwork on the white building that was added in the 70's

Mount Dora also had a grocery store downtown in those days, and it was located on the south side of Fifth Avenue where the Shiva Indian restaurant is now (140 W 5th Ave). At one point a bookstore was in the same space, and that's why you can see an impressive plaster sculpture of books on the outside of that building. Parker's Market had everything you would need, with little grocery carts and bag boys that would follow you outside and place the groceries in your car. The bags were always made of paper, as there was no plastic. If you go to the back side of that building, you can see a ramp descending to the parking lot, and that's how the buggies would get from the store to your car. Mr. Parker (Reggie, to the adults) was the butcher, and my mom would tell him what she wanted and he would cut it off the carcass and package it right in front of you. He had a big, blood-stained bandsaw, right out in the open, that was used to cut large pieces of meat, and at some point in his career he had sliced the first section of one thumb right down the middle. His thumb healed as if it was trying to go two different directions, and as a little boy, I was fascinated by this gross oddity and would stare at it every time I would see him. Reggie's son, Ty, ran the store, and his grandson, Andy, my school friend who lived close by, worked there as a bag boy. I only remember seeing women grocery shopping and my mom would always see friends from the neighborhood and stop and chat. When she was finished shopping they would total up the groceries and

add that amount to her account, which then was paid each month. This was also done at our regular gas station, making it easier than writing a check every time, as there were no credit cards.

Right across Fifth Avenue (133 W 5th Ave) was the office of the Mount Dora Topic, the town newspaper. Mabel Norris Reese was the controversial civil rights advocate and the editor of that paper from 1947 to 1960. There's a bust of her on a pedestal in Sunset Park that explains a bit of her amazing story. The first photograph I ever had published (and got paid three dollars!) was when Al Liveright was the editor in the early 70's. I would bring in my film from a high school sports game, fire or some other thing of interest and he would let me process and print the photos in his little darkroom in the back of the building. It was a real thrill, and I eventually went on to have a lifelong career as a commercial photographer.

Across the street and just to the east of Parker's Market, was the Princess Theater (130 W 5th Ave). It's still there, but has been vacant for many years. Like many buildings in town, it's been around since the 1920's and originally showed silent films. My brothers went to the movies there in the 50's and said it cost a dime and you got a Tootsie Roll for free. When I was a little kid I would ride my bike there and pay \$.25 to see movies like "Goldfinger" with Sean Connery in 1964. At the counter where you paid your money, they had two large glass jars, one with huge pickles and the other with spicy sausages. For a dime they would wrap either of these in a napkin and you would sit and chew on it during the movie. They also had popcorn, soda and candies, as usual. The theater had a distinctive smell and the floor was sticky with decades of spilled soft drinks. Quite often something would go wrong with the projector and you could watch the film seemingly melting on the screen in front of you, interrupting the movie. Everyone would boo and wait for the projectionist to cut out that section, tape it together, and restart the movie. I recall watching the older boys making out with their dates. As a young boy I was grossed out, but as the years went by I wondered if that would ever be me. Dreams really do come true, and as a budding teenager I would meet my girlfriend there and kiss for the very first time in the back of that sticky dark room.



That theater is also a reminder of the dark side of those times. Up to now, my description of Mount Dora could certainly sound like something right out of the TV shows "Mayberry" or "My Three Sons", and it certainly could be ... if you were white.

If you stand in front of the Princess Theater today, you'll notice a door to the left side of the box office window. That's where the Black people entered, paid their money and sat up in the balcony. As a little kid, I didn't understand this and wondered why I couldn't sit up there. When we went to the county fair in Eustis, there were separate water fountains and bathrooms labeled "Blacks" and "Whites". It was a ridiculous doubling of everything, but even though I noticed, I was too young to even think about why this existed.



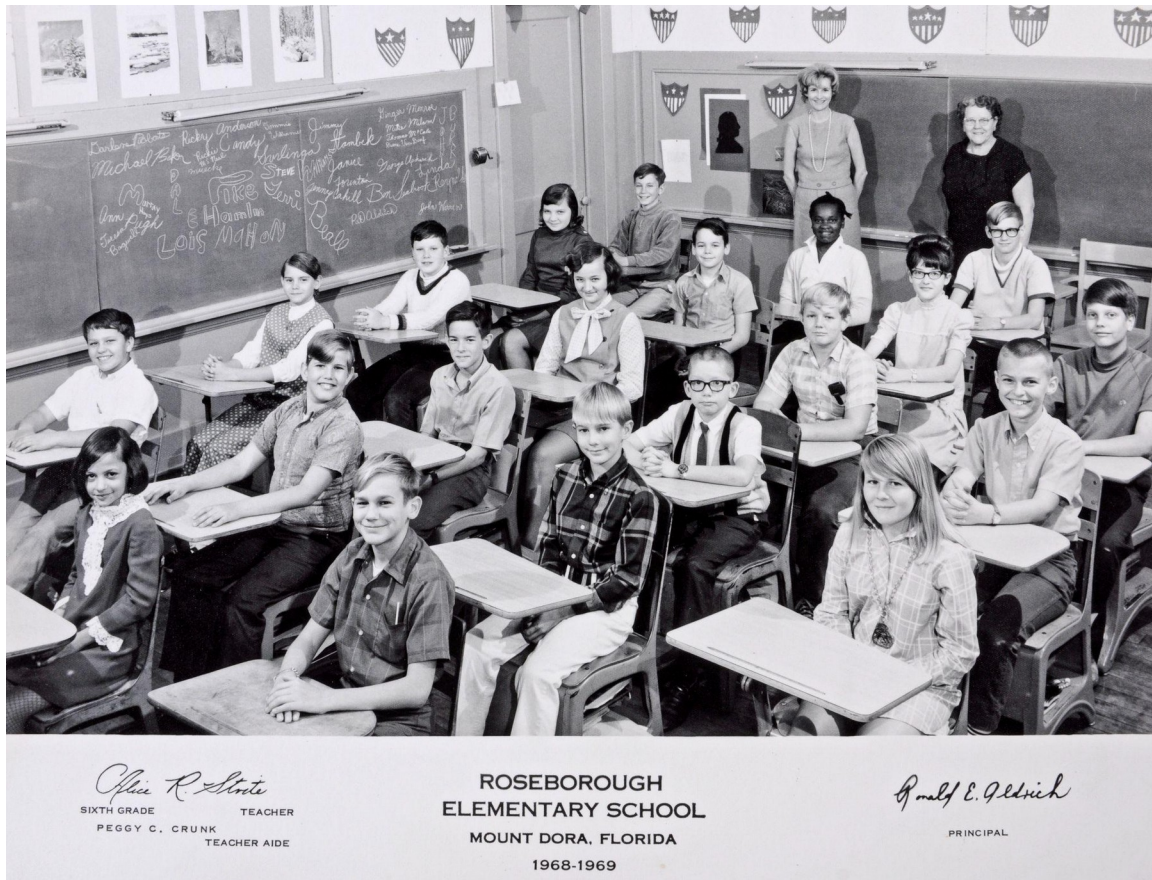
If you read the book "Beneath the Ruthless Sun" by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Gilbert King, he writes extensively about Willis McCall, who was our county sheriff all through the 50's and 60's. It's a long story, but McCall was a racist who would brutalize and sometimes murder his black inmates, and if he was ever prosecuted, the local juries would always acquit him. As a young boy, I knew none of this, and only remember him as the larger-than-life figure I would see in the Christmas parade, riding down Donnelly Street on his massive white horse bejeweled with silver, and Willis wearing an enormous ten-gallon white hat. He was the closest thing I had ever seen to a real cowboy, and little did I know that he was the very symbol of the segregationist attitude at the time.



Sheriff McCall in Life Magazine, 1972

It was a strange dance that both races performed, but with the white people always having the upper hand. We had a black maid for many years, who I thought of almost like an alternate mother. Even though Betty seemed like a family member, she was an employee, and I'm sure would never have been anything more than that to my parents, progressive as they were for the time. The White people seemed to get along just fine with Black people as long as they "knew their place". That all changed with integration and people coming to the realization that not only were we equal, we needed to treat each other that way.

Even though the Supreme Court decided in 1954 that segregation in schools had to end, when I look back at my first three years of elementary school, there were no Black kids in our class photos. In our fourth, fifth and sixth grade classes there would be only one Black kid in each, and my 6th grade was 1969. My brothers never had any Black students when they went to school in Mount Dora, and it's strange to see that so obviously in their yearbook and sports teams' photos from that time.



I'm in the middle with blond hair-only one Black student, even in 1969!

When the White parents in town realized that integration was inevitable, many of them took their kids out of public school and sent them to what was then known as the Mount Dora Christian Home and Bible school on the west side of Donnelly Street, which at that time, had no Black students. I remember my dad disagreeing with that and saying, "you have to learn how to get along with everybody, and it might as well start now." Willis McCall was still sheriff at that time, and I can only imagine how frightening that must've been to be one of those first children to attend our classes. The historically Black school in the "East Town" area was not integrated until I was a sophomore in high school in 1972 and became Mount Dora Middle School.

You could tell the white kids who were brought up by racist parents, as they never seemed to fully accept the change. Tensions simmered just under the surface and racial fights got so bad that our high school was actually closed for several days to let things cool down when I was a senior in 1975. Even though integration was the law, there was self-segregation everywhere. At football games the parents in the stands would be obviously divided and kids would largely sit separated in the lunchroom at school. I had a friend whose father was a doctor in town, and for many years the White waiting room was inside in the air-conditioning and the Black waiting room was outside, although covered from rain and sun. I'm not exactly sure what year the inside room was integrated, but I do recall that some older Black people would still sit outside in the heat in the early 70's.

Even though the predominantly Black area of town, known as "East Town" to everyone, was only 10 blocks north of where I lived, I hardly ever went near there. I do recall it being impoverished, with many homes that were basically just shacks, and none of the roads paved. (there was also an area of extreme white poverty called "Pistolville" east of Highland Street and north of the railroad tracks along Camp Street.) It's easy for us to forget that before the Civil Rights protests and changes in legislation in the 60's, Jim Crow laws were essentially a slightly better form of the slavery that Blacks endured for generations. All four of my grandparents were born in the late 1800s, so that means their parents were alive during slavery. That's a good example of how recent it was and also how far we have come. I certainly can't know what it would feel like to realize that my very recent ancestors were slaves, but I can see that feelings of anger, or at least distrust, towards White people would be understandable.



This was very typical when I was a kid: Black men on wooden ladders picking oranges. When I worked at the Zellwood muck farms in the early 70's, all of the farm workers were Black

Another thing you didn't want to be back then was gay. We were all very naïve in those days and I had no concept of homosexuality until I went to college. I had just never thought about it. It had never occurred to me until later that I had unwittingly known and interacted with gay people while growing up in Mount Dora.

I was brought up in the Episcopal Church, which was on the same block I grew up on. They sponsored our Boy Scout troop and I was an acolyte in the church for several years. As it turns out, our priest was gay, and I was oblivious. When I was very young, I remember a story about how two men had been caught in the public bathroom in Gilbert Park, and of course that made it into the local newspaper. One of the men was married with a family and he committed suicide right after that. The fact that same-sex couples can be married and have families now would've been unfathomable at that time.

And now, back to the "Ozzie and Harriet show".

I was not raised in a musical home, and even though we had a giant stereo cabinet in the living room that just looked like another piece of furniture, we would really only listen to records at Christmas. My older brothers, on the other hand, had their own records which I would hear in our upstairs bedrooms. People sometimes think of the 60's as all hippies and flower power, but that didn't really happen until later in the decade. The early 60's were just an extension of the 50's, with flat tops and bouffant hairdos, and the music was still largely The Lettermen and Pat Boone, with rock 'n' roll creeping around the corner. Our high school had a strict dress code until around 1970; girl's skirts could only be so short, boy's hair had to stay off their collar and sideburns couldn't be lower than your ear. A female friend from that time told me that they checked your skirt length by having you kneel, and if your hem didn't touch the floor, you were sent home. If you think about what was going on in the country, particularly in California with drugs, rock music and "the summer of love", you can see how protected and behind the times we were in my little hometown in Central Florida.

For better or worse, I grew up in an innocent time, but one that would quickly change. Abortion was illegal until 1973, and the birth control pill became more common around that time as well. When my brothers were in school, sex was hazardous, and if a girl happened to get pregnant, she would just go missing for a while, "off to visit her aunt", as they would say. By the time we were the right age, all that had changed dramatically. Not only did we have sex education classes, scaring us with the STD's they said we would most certainly get, we also had drug education, warning us of our impending death, or at the very least, psychotic

episodes. Marijuana use was extremely illegal back then, considered on a par with heroin. There was a kid a year older than me who spent time in jail for getting caught with it. At that time they still had "chain gangs" which you could see on the sides of the road in their striped uniforms, cutting the brush with sling blades, and he ended up on one of those.

Besides the sex and drugs we had going for us, the drinking age was temporarily lowered from 21 to 18 at exactly the right or wrong time for us, depending on how you looked at it. The rationale behind the change in law was that if you were old enough to be drafted and go fight in the Vietnam War, you should be old enough to drink. Nice thought, but bad idea. Drunk driving, and alcohol ID laws were still lax at the time, so it was very easy for us to buy booze by the time we were 15 or so.

There was a restaurant/bar on Highland Street that was just past the Lake County line called The Rudo that had a drive up window for their liquor store. We would get the guy with the lowest voice or the most facial hair to drive, and he would pull up and order our beer. We could get a six pack of Old Milwaukee in the can for two dollars. Cheap alcohol and teenage boys are not a good combination, and it's just pure luck that we survived those years.



These boys are up to no good—I'm on the far right

When I went to Mount Dora High School it was in a number of one-story, concrete block buildings, obviously built by the lowest bidder. By the time I got there in 1970 it was all air conditioned, unlike when my brother Sam attended. There was no middle school yet, so it contained grades 7 through 12, and being around those senior girls as a 13 year old boy was like being in the presence of movie stars. They seemed so grown up and beautiful to me, and I didn't dare speak to them.



Brand new Mount Dora High School in 1962

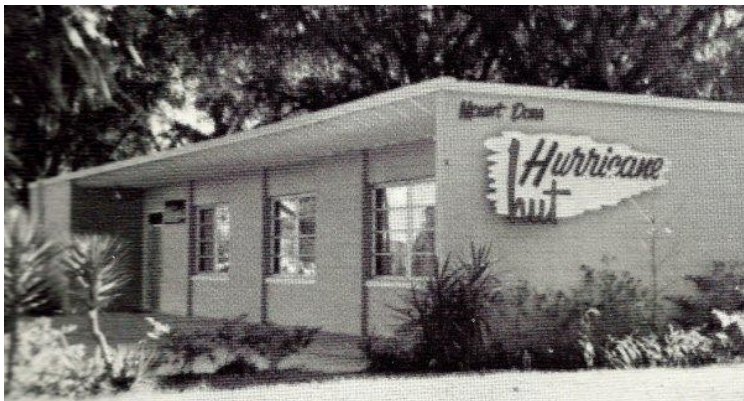
Our 7th grade Algebra teacher, Mr Spears, was also the football coach, and the only thing I remember is him joking in his thick Southern accent, "Pi aren't square, pie are round, cornbread are square"! That could be one reason I was never good at math. Education is what you make of it, and against all odds, some of our classmates went on to respectable careers as doctors, engineers and such.

At our high school in 1975 the only sport available for girls was swimming, and perhaps because of that, it's the only one I did. Girls could be cheerleaders, but that was it. My how times have changed for the better.

I was more interested in the social aspect of school and was rarely absent because I didn't want to miss anything. Homecoming was one such big deal, and on the day before the game they used to have a pep rally, followed by a "snake dance", and then a giant bonfire that would be completely illegal now. The snake dance wasn't a dance at all, but a long line of students holding hands that stretched for quite a ways. They would start in the middle of 7th Ave, and people at the front would move from one side of the street to the other, pulling everyone along and "weaving" like a snake as they went along. It was great, chaotic fun, and if you were at the end of line, you really got whipped around, which my friend Clay and I used to love to do, well before we were old enough. (we also used to ride our bikes in the "fog" (malathion) behind the mosquito control truck, so we obviously weren't the brightest kids!)



There was also a Homecoming dance with a live band that was held in the "Hurricane Hut", a small concrete building at Highland and 7th, funded by the Jaycees to give kids a place to go after school and hold other events, such as dances. Rock music burst onto the scene after the Beatles made their debut in 1964. Lots of kids wanted to be in bands to sound and look like them, and I was one of them. We had a great local group called "The Wrong Numbers" that would play at dances, along with "The Tropics", who had matching outfits with large vertically striped pants that I thought were the coolest thing ever! I was still too young to go inside to watch, but I would stand outside listening ... entranced.





Remember phone booths? Also, rotary dials



"The Tropics" with their cool pants and "Beatle Boots"

The Homecoming parade ran down Donnelly Street, as it still does today, and featured our football players, cheerleaders, the marching band and a host of fairly elaborate "floats". Each grade level would spend days making these rolling contraptions, coming up with a design, creating a frame of borrowed (stolen) wood wrapped in chicken wire. Every hole in the wire was then stuffed with paper napkins of orange and white (our school colors) until the desired pattern emerged. There was a vote as to who had the best float, and then after the parade they were placed in the quadrangle near the cafeteria, and later sacrificed to the bonfire.



This is a Homecoming display our class of 1975 made, showing a hurricane (our school mascot) lighting a cannon. I realize it looks like a tornado, but a hurricane is difficult to reproduce. That's a lot of napkins!



These floats are from the 60's and the top ones show the Queen and her court

Voting for Homecoming Queen was also a big deal and they did not have "Kings" as they do now. In 1963, my brother Sam's girlfriend, Donna Simpson, was crowned and he was her escort. In 2023 they were invited back to walk the past Queen across the field during halftime of the Homecoming football game to crown the new winners.



Sam Williams and Donna Simpson in 1963, back when they really knew how to dress!



50 years later they were back on the same field with a new queen

In my senior year Theresa Hennis was selected as our Homecoming Queen, and purely by chance (and mostly because the football players were not allowed) I ended up being her escort. If we get invited to be with the new queen in 2025, I'll have to update this.



Theresa looks so surprised. Check out that 1975 tux!

My friends and I called ourselves the "River Rats" because we would spend weekends and have parties at a house on the Wekiva River. Groups of teenage boys are usually up to no good and we were no exception. For one Homecoming game we "borrowed" a number of benches from Donnelly Park and hauled them onto the roof of the school cafeteria on a Sunday night with a crudely printed sign that said, "Bench the Bulldogs", our nemesis football team mascot. I guess it was so obvious who would have done such a thing that a call came over the intercom on Monday morning in Mr. Spaulding's science class, where most of us were in attendance, commanding, "the boys who stole the city park benches come to the principal's

office now". We had to return the property and apologize to the city, but otherwise we got away with it.



An event that started in 1975, and is celebrating its 50th anniversary next year, is the Mount Dora Arts Festival. I was the high school yearbook photographer in my senior year and had enough mounted prints of a semi-artistic nature to submit. (Interesting fact: Marc Vaughn was the yearbook photographer in '74, and his cousin, Eric Swanson, in '76, and all three of us went on to have lifelong careers as commercial photographers, me in L.A., Marc in Miami, and Eric in Santa Fe) Fortunately, the competition for entry into the Festival wasn't great back then, and I was accepted. The processing fee was \$2 (it's now \$25), the booth fee was \$10 (it's now \$350), and the "Best of Show" purchase award prize was \$750 (it's now \$5000). I had a nice location right in Donnelly in front of the shuffleboard courts and did not sell a single thing. Looking back on my display, I can tell why.



That's me on the left and Marc Vaughn on the right with other members of the MDHS "Photography Club" in 1974. One photo can say a lot.

Scouting was big when I was a kid, and most every boy I knew was involved. In some of our class photos you can see kids wearing their uniform to school, if they had a meeting that day. We started Cub Scouts around age 8 and did that for three years, progressing in rank as our moms took turns being "Den Mothers". At 11 we

could become official Boy Scouts, and I was deeply involved for the next four years, spending summers at "Camp La-No-Che" on Lake Norris, earning merit badges and advancing in rank. It was there that I was exposed to camping, canoeing, sailing, life saving, rowing, survival skills, and many more. It was an important time in my life where I learned leadership, service, how to get along in a group, and how to have the confidence to take care of myself and my friends in any situation. These will be things that would end up being helpful the rest of my life.

Our troop had great leaders who took us on camping trips to North Carolina, staying at Army bases along the way. A group of us went to the National Jamboree in Idaho, along with 35,000 other scouts in 1969, and I was able to go to the World Jamboree in Japan for a month in 1971. I also learned patience and the determination it takes to reach goals, eventually achieving the rank of Eagle Scout, as my brothers had done before me, and my father before them.



Sam, Mark, Buster and Steve in 1999

Many things that are done electronically now, you had to do by hand back then, and one of those was changing the TV station, of which there were only three at the time: NBC, CBS and ABC. Children were the original remote control, which might also include moving the "rabbit ears" antenna for better reception on the TV that sat on the floor like a huge piece of furniture. The televisions were so heavy back then that the TV repairman came to you. When something was wrong, Mr. Stewart would arrive with his bag full of tubes and do his magic to get the thing working again.

As a youngster, our TV was black-and-white and it never dawned on me for it to be anything else. There was a bit of a "chicken and egg" problem moving to color, as no one was willing to buy those more expensive TVs when there was no color programming, and the stations weren't willing to create color programs because no one had the TVs to see them with. I distinctly remember our first color TV, and being able to watch "Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color," along with a few other shows that were also catching up with the times. I was allowed to stay up late and watch the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan show in February 1964, but it was still in black-and-white at that time.

My favorite TV shows in the mid-60's were comedies like *Gilligan's Island*, *Hogan's Heroes*, *Get Smart*, and *Batman*, the program that always left you with a cliffhanger situation that seemed unsolvable. My favorite show was *The Monkees* and my friends and I knew all of their songs and thought they were the coolest. Saturday morning cartoons were also a must, and I would always watch *The Flintstones*, *Bullwinkle*, *The Jetsons*, and *Bugs Bunny*. There was no *Sesame Street* until 1969, so I missed that. Because there was no streaming or method to record shows, you had to watch them when they came on or you would never see them again. That meant you had to be right there in front of the TV when your episode aired. Since we only had one television, it also meant that you had to negotiate with your family if there was a program they wanted to watch that was showing at the same time. There was no remote with a mute button, so you had to listen to all of the commercials, which could also be entertaining. Little did I know that when Nancy Walker played "Rosie" in the Bounty paper towel TV ads that I would end up dating her daughter twenty years later!

Obviously, there were no computers when we were in school, so if you needed to look something up for a school report, you went to a massive set of encyclopedias that many families owned, including ours. We might also go to the town library, built in 1912 and used until 1977, it still stands at 308 E 5th Ave. The children's section was in the basement, which was accessed through stairs on the west side, and I can still remember the smell of mold and mildew in that room!

If your homework required a written report, you wrote it by hand, or used a manual typewriter. When you made a mistake you had to dab a bit of "white out" to the wrong letters, let it dry, and go back and type over that section again. I had to take typing class in high school and thought it was a total waste of time -- "Why will I ever need to know how to type?", I remember saying. Seriously, back then we thought only secretaries needed to have that skill, and now everyone does.

Because there was no texting or email, if you wanted to say something to a person who lived far away, you wrote a letter. My mom saved the letters we wrote to each other when I was away at summer camp and they are priceless reminders of

motherly love. My father often wrote to his brother who lived in Spain, and I loved the thin envelopes and odd postage stamps that arrived from overseas. It cost five cents to send a letter in 1964, versus 63 cents today. ZIP Codes were not mandatory until 1967.

There were no cell phones, but telephones plugged into a jack in the wall, and for the longest time, they had only rotary dials. You learned to appreciate phone numbers that didn't have a lot of the higher digits, because to dial the number "9" meant that you had to stick your finger in the hole and spin it from one side all the way to the other side and then wait for it to come back around before you could put in the next number. You could dial "213" in a third of the time it would take you to dial "897".

You didn't have to dial the area code within Mount Dora and every single number in town started with "383". At that time you didn't even need to dial the three and the eight, as long as you were dialing someone else in town. For example, if you wanted to phone our house, all you had to do was dial 32125, which was quick and easy. All of the early Mount Dora phone numbers started with a "2" in the last four digits, and the First National Bank of Mount Dora still has the same phone number: 383-2111.

Until 1965 there were only two area codes in the entire state of Florida, 305 and 813, and then 904 was created for our area. There are now 20, because of the huge amount of growth. If you wanted to call someone in a different area code, not only was it expensive, but you had to dial zero and ask the operator to connect you. You could ask for a "person to person call" where the operator would make the call, ask if the particular person was available, and if not, you weren't charged.

A new phone book would be delivered to your home each year with the names and numbers of everyone in town. (My friend Clay and I would make crank calls, and one time we called the last name in the phone book, Mrs Zimmer, and we breathlessly said we had just finished calling everyone in the book, and she was our last call. We thought this was hilarious!) The back of the phone book would have ads for local businesses and those pages were printed in yellow. Without the internet, the only way to discover the plumbers in your area was to look them up in this little book. If you wanted to find the number of a person or business outside of Mount Dora, you dialed the operator and she (it was always a woman) would look it up for you for free. As time went on, you'd dial 411 for information, and they eventually started charging for the service.

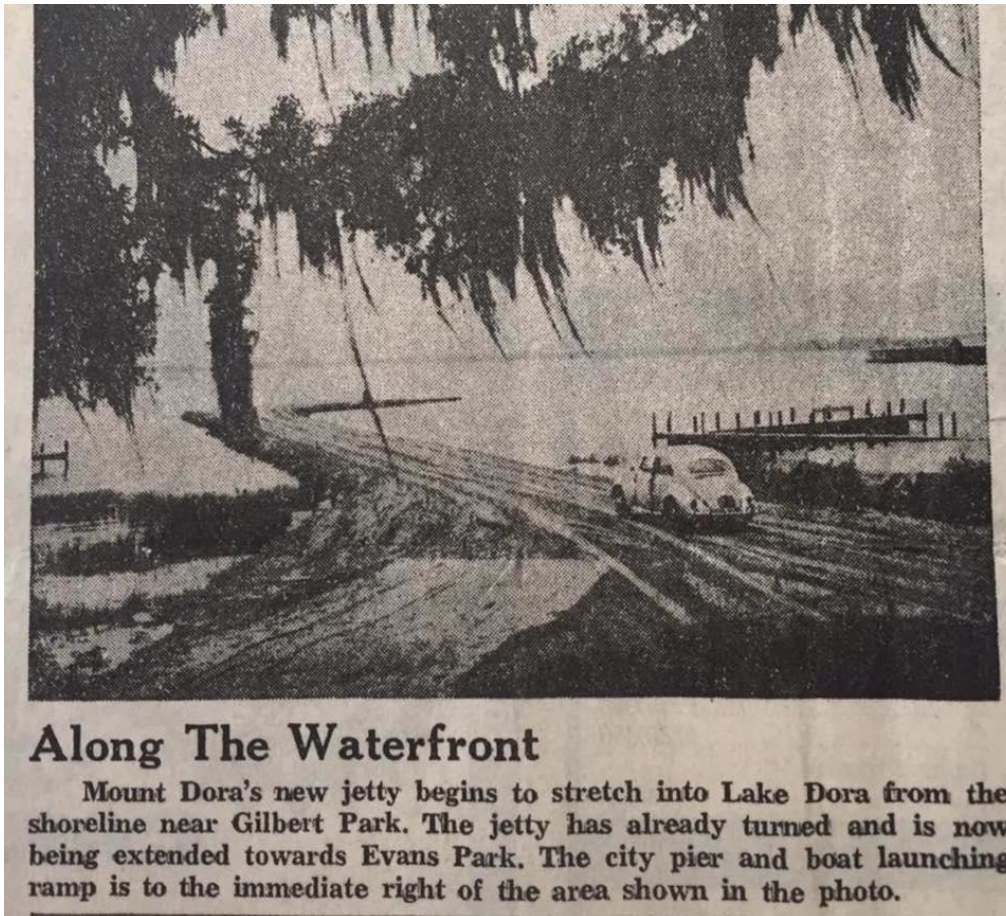
There were no marketing calls to bother you in those days (only crank calls from juvenile delinquents!), so when the phone rang, it was from someone you knew and we would race to answer it. There were no answering machines or voice mail, so if you missed a call, you just missed it. If someone was using the phone when you called, you got a busy signal and had to call later. If you were on the phone with

your girlfriend and your mom needed to make a call, she might pick up another phone in the house and tell you to hang up. We couldn't imagine a time when everyone would have their own private phone.

We lived right downtown, and for the longest time there was no trash pickup. We had a compost pile in the backyard for all things that could rot, and a 55 gallon drum turned on its side that was a "burn bin" for most everything else. The city provided a place to dump large items that you couldn't burn, and that was located behind where the Icehouse Theater is now, at Unser and 11th. You would just back up your vehicle and throw whatever you needed to get rid of in a large pit, and every once in a while a city employee would use a tractor to cover the area with dirt. The mountain bike trails now run right through that area with no idea what's under their tires.

In that same general location there was a mound of dirt that was used as the backstop for the rifle range. I've never owned a gun in my life, but when I was a kid, I would love to go to this place and practice target shooting. The local NRA chapter had a program to teach gun safety, and provided the 22 caliber rifles and bullets for a small fee. I was only interested in seeing how close I could come to hitting the bullseye, but the adults kept a close eye on us and made sure we didn't kill each other.

We also didn't have city sewage, so everyone had a septic tank in their yard. You could tell where it was because the grass was always greener in that spot. Around 1960 Mount Dora put in sewer lines in our area, and each house had to pay to get connected and then start paying a fee each month. It wasn't very popular, but obviously needed. As a little boy, I was fascinated by all the bulldozers and earth movers rumbling through the neighborhood, tearing up the streets. The city had to figure out what to do with all of the pavement that got removed, and it was decided to create a peninsula of this material down by Griffith Park. Truck after truck of old street stuff was dumped into Lake Dora, creating what is now called Grantham Point (named after the head of Public Works at the time) with a functioning lighthouse at the end. As you walk down the path, you can still see the remnants of that project on both sides, descending into the water.



Along The Waterfront

Mount Dora's new jetty begins to stretch into Lake Dora from the shoreline near Gilbert Park. The jetty has already turned and is now being extended towards Evans Park. The city pier and boat launching ramp is to the immediate right of the area shown in the photo.

Even though most people had home refrigeration, milk and ice cream were delivered directly to your house for years after it was necessary. My brothers remember milk arriving in bottles, which you had to shake because the cream had risen to the top, and I recall it being delivered by T.G. Lee trucks well into the 60's. By that time the containers had changed to cardboard and you had to be careful to follow the directions to open them. Now we have little, round plastic tabs that have to be removed, but back then cartons required opening from the correct side in a two-stage maneuver that was trickier than it should have been.

Another thing that seems strange looking back on it, is how many people smoked. My dad never did, but my mom was hooked until she was well into her 60's. People smoked everywhere, even in cars full of kids, in restaurants, planes, and on TV shows. It was everywhere and just considered normal. This is another great thing that progress has brought us that we take for granted.

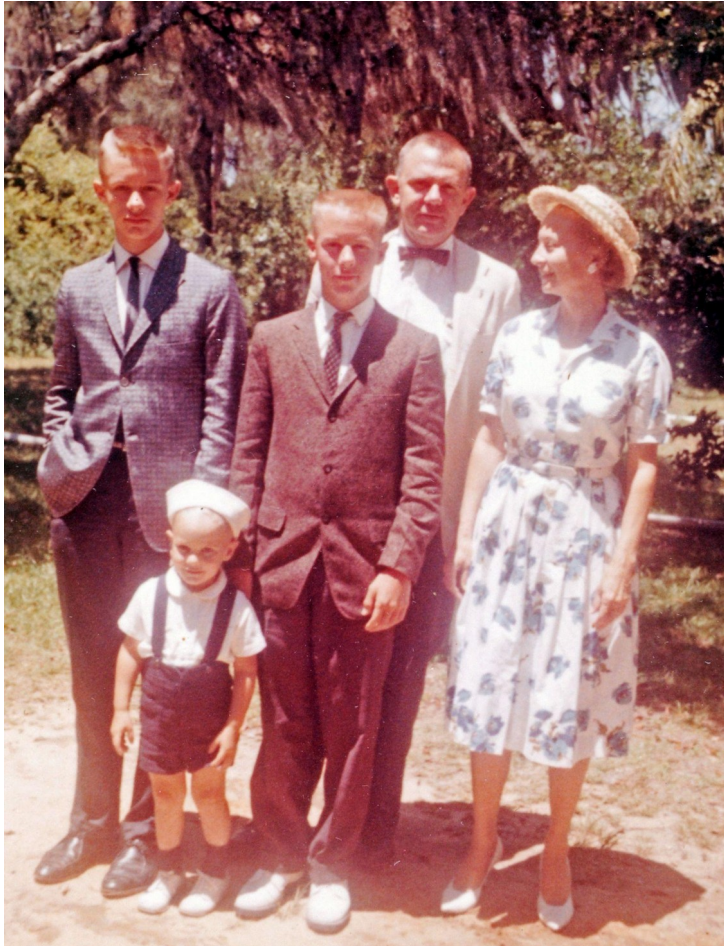
Seatbelts didn't become mandatory in automobiles until 1968, and even then, they just sat there unused for years. The first ones were awkward and difficult to use, and even when shoulder harnesses showed up, they were permanently attached and didn't retract, as they do now. There were no child safety seats, so you would

hold the baby in your lap, and kids would just roam around the car, moving from front to back. It's so weird to think about all this now, but it was just the way it was – dangerous.

Until the 70's almost every vehicle you'd see was a Ford, Chrysler or Chevy. It helps to remember that in 1965 the war had only been over for 20 years and no one was in the mood to buy a Japanese or German automobile. My dad always bought Pontiacs, and we would go to the McNamara dealership in Orlando (there were no car dealers in our area then) where he would test drive a car, order it in exactly the model and color he wanted, and wait for it to be delivered. Because of his missing left leg, he needed an automatic transmission, which was uncommon then, and he also ordered air conditioning when that came available. We had the same salesman every time and there was no haggling, Buster just paid the listed price, as that's the way it was done.

For the longest time car radios picked up AM stations only, and it sounded terrible through the one crappy speaker. You rotated a dial until the music had the least amount of static and then you could save that station with one of five buttons. Our first FM broadcast was WLBE in 1969 and it not only sounded better, but played something other than country music! 8-track tape players started showing up in the late 60's, and that allowed you to play any type of music you liked. Car stereos got better, along with the speakers, and it was quite the thing to have a great system. I knew a guy who installed reverb in his car and I thought it was the coolest thing ever. Those 8-track tapes would often melt if left in the sun, and the tape would sometimes be "eaten" by the player, making a mess and ruining your music.

We take it for granted now that almost everyone has a camera, and because of that, nearly every aspect of life is documented in photographs. That used to not be the case. When I was a boy, cameras were expensive and complicated, and very few people had them. You had to buy the film, know how to use the camera, then get the film processed and have prints made. My grandmother, who lived in Eustis, was the only person I knew that had a camera. She called it her "Kodak", because that's who made it. The only time we had our picture taken was for special events like birthdays, or the holidays. All the kids had our photos taken once a year at school, when a professional photographer would show up. Our group photo was taken in our classroom with every child well-dressed for the occasion, sitting politely at their desks, hands folded, looking up and smiling at the camera. Even when the Kodak Instamatic camera debuted in the mid 60s, it took a long time for it to catch on. When I was around 12 years old I played drums in a "band" with a couple of other boys, and remarkably, I don't have a single photograph of that. My father, brother and I went to the Montreal World's Fair in 1967, and I don't have a photograph of that either. As difficult as that is to imagine now, we just didn't have a camera.



This is typical of the kind of photo my grandmother would take with her "Kodak". Probably taken in 1960 during Easter Sunday. Nice hat, huh?

There were no video games for us to get addicted to in those days, and not much to watch on television, so we had to create our own entertainment. I think because of that, I've never felt bored. As soon as I learned how to ride a bicycle, I had my freedom and would go visit my friends all over town. Depending on our age, we might have been creating dams in the little creek that has always flowed through Gilbert Park, playing tag football, shooting a BB gun, or trying to catch fish in Lake Dora. There was always something to do, you just had to use your imagination and be creative. The only thing I was told not to do was to hitchhike. Other than that, it didn't seem as if our parents worried much about our personal safety. My guess is that there were probably as many bad things that could happen then as there are now, there just wasn't 24 hour news scaring people about it all the time.

I think it's great that fathers are much more involved in the day-to-day care of their children now, but that just wasn't the case for us. Gender roles were well defined: mom's mostly stayed home, made breakfast and saw the kids off to school in the morning and were there when they returned in the afternoon. Dad's were at work all

day, and other than being called on from time to time as disciplinarians, they pretty much let their wives take care of child rearing. Each generation gradually learns from the past and breaks free of the mistakes their parents made, but it takes time.

People seem to take better care of themselves these days as well. I know for a fact that my mom didn't exercise a day in her life - it wasn't considered "Lady Like". My parents were never overweight, but looking back at photos, for them 40 was the new 50, and not the other way around! Obesity was definitely not the problem back then as it is today, I assume because junk food and fast food restaurants were just not very common. It was a big deal when the first McDonald's opened in Eustis, and then all the others followed soon after.

Another thing that was different was how people dressed up more. We had "school clothes" and then when you got home you changed into your "play clothes". You wore a nice outfit to go to church, fly on a plane, or for that unique occasion when you would go to a restaurant. Compared to now, clothing was proportionately more expensive, so you didn't have a lot of different items, and shopping for them was a bigger deal. Eustis had the biggest and best clothing store around, called Farren's. It was in a huge building from the 1800s, at 12 E Magnolia Ave. It's been a number of different restaurants since the department store closed in the 1990s, so you can visit and get a feel for the place. I would go there with my mom to buy fiendishly uncomfortable "Buster Brown" shoes that had to be "broken in", along with incredibly stiff blue jeans with pant legs way too long that had to be worn with cuffs, because you would eventually grow into them. I got my Cub Scout uniform there at age 8, Boy Scout outfit at 11, and eventually rented a tux for Prom as a teenager. Every time we visited, through all those years, we had the same salesman, Scottie, with a pencil in his ear and a tape measure around his neck. The store seemed massive to me, with an unusually high ceiling and wood floors that creaked, seemingly no matter where you stepped. There were no interior divisions of space, so it was all open with just large columns to hold up the ceiling. The upper floor was for bookkeeping, and pneumatic tubes would take your cash payment (there were no credit cards yet), placed in a little plastic container, and whisk it away with a swoosh of pressurized air. Eventually, it would come back down through the same tube with your change. As a little kid, I found this endlessly fascinating.



I'm sure this styling outfit came from Ferran's in 1959



I rented this bitchin' paisley prom tux from Ferran's in 1973

These are the questionable recollections of my time growing up in Mount Dora. I've tried to be honest and not exaggerate, it was a strange enough time without having to do that. I've also placed our family history within the context of a small town growing quickly during the past 100 years, but still with a tradition of protecting the main core of downtown that hasn't changed much in all that time.

When traveling, people always ask where you're from, and I used to say, "a small town north of Orlando". I now say "Mount Dora", and I'm amazed at how many people, from all over the country, have heard of it! The town I couldn't wait to get away from, and stop being "Buster's son", is now a place I'm proud to call home. For good.

Steven Burr Williams 3/2024

This is a video of Buster being interviewed by the Mount Dora High School video production class: <https://youtu.be/Qe3ERkSeoFw>

This video is of him showing where he was born and where they lived in Mount Dora, with interesting stories along the way: <https://youtu.be/dKJOnvtaEfQ>